

VLF 9/6/6  
NRHP 5/2/7

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name: Willowdale

other names/site number: DHR # 001-0062 ; Smith Place, Gunther Farm, Willow Dale

**2. Location**

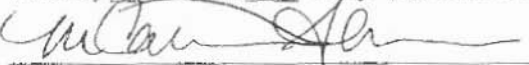
street & number: 18412 Willowdale Drive N/A not for publication

city or town: Painter N/A vicinity

state: Virginia code: VA county: Accomack Zip code: 23420

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
Signature of certifying official

3/22/07  
Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

   entered in the National Register

   See continuation sheet.

   determined eligible for the National Register

   See continuation sheet.

   determined not eligible for the National Register

   removed from the National Register

   other (explain):   

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

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**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

**Number of Resources within Property**

| Contributing | Noncontributing     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| <u>1</u>     | <u>0</u> buildings  |
| <u>1</u>     | <u>0</u> sites      |
| <u>0</u>     | <u>0</u> structures |
| <u>0</u>     | <u>0</u> objects    |
| <u>2</u>     | <u>0</u> Total      |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.): N/A

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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: \_\_\_\_\_ Sub: \_\_\_\_\_  
Domestic Single dwelling  
Agricultural/subsistence Agricultural field

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: \_\_\_\_\_ Sub: \_\_\_\_\_  
Domestic Single dwelling  
Agricultural/subsistence Agricultural field  
WORK IN PROGRESS

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)Colonial**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: Brick  
Roof: Asphalt  
Walls: Wood weatherboard sides, Brick ends  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions) Exploration/Settlement; Architecture

**Period of Significance** 1666 – circa 1899  
1666-1728 - Settlement and agriculture  
1728-1865 - Slave plantation and agriculture and original architecture  
1866-1940s - Post-Civil War agriculture and architectural development

**Significant Dates** 1666 - patent land grant first deeds Willowdale to the Smith family  
1728 - present main house constructed  
1865 - slavery ends; 1940s - last occupation of the property

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** Smith, John or George; Smith, Hewitt; Smith, George M.P.; Smith, Francis

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☒ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # VA1239
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

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## Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 16 acres

## UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

|   | Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone    | Easting | Northing | Zone   | Easting | Northing |    |        |         |
|---|------|---------|----------|------|---------|----------|---------|---------|----------|--------|---------|----------|----|--------|---------|
| A | 18   | 432656  | 4157107  | B    | 18      | 432951   | 4156934 | C       | 18       | 432805 | 4156810 | D        | 18 | 432637 | 4156837 |

See Continuation Sheet

## Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

## Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Catherine R. Harrison, Ph.D.  
Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 12 June 2006  
Street & number: 1416 Eileen Drive Telephone: 937-671-0832  
City or town: Beavercreek State: OH Zip code: 45434

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

## Continuation Sheets

**Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs** Representative black and white photographs of the property.**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name/title: Catherine R. Harrison, Ph.D. Date: 12 June 2006  
Street & number: 1416 Eileen Drive Telephone: 937-671-0832  
City or town: Beavercreek State: OH Zip code: 45434

=====  
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**7. Description**

**Summary:**

Willowdale is located at the end of a long farm lane that branches east from the Seaside Road, one mile south of Mappsburg, Accomack County, Virginia. The main building is a two-story, five-bay, gambrel roof, frame house with brick ends laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers, above a continuous brick foundation laid in English bond. From the south brick end of the main block a two-bay, single story extension provides service from a story and a half kitchen with a large brick cooking fireplace at the south end. The present center passage - single pile plan of the main block was expanded around a seventeenth century patent house of one and a half stories that now forms the parlor at the north end of the main block. The architecture is characteristic of the vernacular "big house, little house, colonnade, kitchen" style that was common in colonial homes on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, in which the earliest structures were appended to form long, multi-block structures with varied roof heights. The house and ruins of an early barn are located on a roughly triangular parcel of 16 acres, surrounded by farm fields to the north and west, by marshland to the south, and by the Machipongo River to the east. This 16-acre site has been known historically as the Point, consisting of the highest and most desirable living site on the original, historical farm.

**Detailed Description:**

Willowdale is located at the end of a long farm lane that branches east from the Seaside Road, one mile south of Mappsburg, Accomack County, Virginia. The house is located on a roughly triangular parcel of 16 acres, surrounded by farm fields to the north and west, by marshland to the south, and by the Machipongo River to the east. The farm to the north of this parcel constitutes the balance of the original farm belonging to the house, and contains the ancestral graveyard with graves dating to the eighteenth century as well as the ruins of the dower house. The nominated parcel itself contains the original house and the ruins of an historic barn.

Built to face the farm lane to the west and the river to the east, the two-story, five bay, brick end, frame house is supported on a raised English bond continuous brick foundation with root cellar, and the medium-pitched gambrel roof is covered in asphalt shingles on the top portion and wood siding on the lower portion. Remnants of original wood shingle remain under both sections. The gable ends reveal that the main block was originally a story and a half structure of 18' by 20', consistent with the requirements for a patent house. The roof was raised to the current

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gambrel roof when the second story was added. Differences in the roof under the north versus south end of the main block, differences in the brick on the south end versus the north, the fact that the plaster in the center passage outside the parlor to the north conceals very old cedar siding, and the remnants in the attic of an exterior wall to the north, further support the idea that the northern end of the house was the original patent house, a two bay, single pile, story and a half structure with a single very large fireplace and brick end. The patent house would have been built around the time of the original patent in the late seventeenth century.

The front and rear walls of the center-passage/single pile main block are sheathed in weatherboard, much of it dating to the nineteenth century. The gable ends are laid in Flemish bond brick with glazed headers. Windows are four-over-four sash, some of which retain original colonial glass. Window openings are flanked by nineteenth century louvered shutters.

Upstairs in the main house there were originally two bedrooms to the north and south of a central landing/hall. The north bedroom was divided, perhaps in the early twentieth century, into two rooms with a connecting door. In addition, a room was partitioned in the twentieth century from the central landing/hall on the west side above the front door. The later enclosure of that room is clear because one wall of it is immediately behind the diagonally spindled railing and banister for the staircase. This added room provides access to the stairs to the attic.

Over time the original fireplaces of the main house have been made smaller and then in filled to provide flues for heating stoves. Some of the infilling, particularly on the north end, has caused instability in the brick over time. It is not yet known if there were originally fireplaces in the upstairs bedrooms.

Attached to the south gable end is a 1 story, 2 bay, frame wing (enclosed in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century) that provides service to the main block from the 1-1/2 story, 2 bay, frame kitchen, dating to the early to mid nineteenth century, with a large brick fireplace and chimney on the south end. The stepped style of the main block and adjoining blocks is typical of "big house, little house, colonnade, kitchen" architecture of Eastern Shore colonial-period homes. Whitelaw states that the main block was built in 1728, but bases this date upon a dated brick once embedded (recently stolen by vandals) in the exterior brick of the second story of the south end. By all architectural indications discussed above, that is the most recent area of the main house.

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The kitchen appears to date to the early 1800s, and this date is confirmed by Whitelaw and Smith family oral history. The kitchen features a large brick fireplace for cooking with a brick hearth. This fireplace is laid in English bond. The kitchen has a loft above, accessed by a staircase that has been stolen. Later in the 1800s the colonnade between the dining room and the kitchen was enclosed, forming the "little house." There is an enclosed extension from the east side of this room with a shed roof, which probably enclosed part of the existing porch.

Early photographs reveal a sloping porch that covered the west-facing central door and two adjacent windows. The porch has since been removed. There remains a gable-roof portico over the west-facing door to the colonnade room, which is badly deteriorated. On the east side, a shed room extends from the north end of the colonnade room to the east, and to the south of that a badly deteriorated porch extends to the southern end of the kitchen. The roof of this east-facing porch has been removed within the past year due to severe deterioration.

The property is currently in deteriorated condition and is in need of both structural repair and a new roof. Vandals have stolen heart pine floorboards from the parlor and attic, and the original paneling in the parlor has been stolen, as well as chair rail in the kitchen. Nevertheless, many unique original details are preserved, including early eighteenth-century window moldings in the parlor and original nineteenth century faux grain painting on doors and woodwork upstairs. Much original plaster remains, and original paint colors are preserved in plaster and wood. There are remnants of very old wallpaper in the stairwell. The home was updated several times during the nineteenth century, and the existing structure preserves elements of eighteenth and nineteenth century vernacular architecture with very little twentieth century modification other than the re-partitioning of the upstairs rooms.

Whitelaw's *Virginia's Eastern Shore: A History of Northampton and Accomack Counties* (1968), and Lanier and Herman, in *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic* (1997) picture and describe the Willowdale dwelling as an example of the "big house, little house, colonnade, kitchen" style of architecture that prevailed from colonial times on the Eastern Shore and throughout the mid-Atlantic, and that is much copied in modern colonial style homes. (1)

Contributing resources for the purpose of this nomination are the dwelling, the barn ruins, as well as the entire 16-acre site, which was the primary location of activities related to operations of the plantation from its beginnings in 1666. The property had numerous outbuildings that no longer in exist, and includes evidence of oyster beds, a smokehouse that was stolen in the 1970s, and an

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early barn that was diagrammed and discussed in Lanier and Herman. Family oral tradition passed on to the present owner from her grandmother, Emma Smith Gunther, also describes “shore facilities for schooners that anchored in the then-deeper Machipongo River, cider house, and slave quarters”. An archeological survey would no doubt uncover artifacts from centuries of residential and agricultural use not only by the owners but by slave and servant inhabitants of the property as well as earlier indigenous people.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Summary Statement:**

Willowdale is unique in that it is one of the few remaining examples of the dwelling of an early colonial settler, landowner and farmer. It is further unique by having been held continuously by one family, demonstrating the evolution of a dwelling through multiple generations of one family. Family wills, records of Accomack County, and Whitelaw’s book on the Eastern Shore support Smith family oral tradition in documenting the history of Willowdale farm as the residence and enterprise of the Smith family, owners of Willowdale from 1666 to the present day. The farm is usually referred to in wills as “the farm in Machipongo.” (2) Wills of the Smith family in the Accomack County Courthouse document the household goods as well as slaves residing on the farm at the time of each passing of ownership. Accomack court and marriage records document the involvement of the Smith family in the civic life of the Eastern Shore for more than 250 years. (3) Willowdale is being nominated locally under Criterion A in the area of Exploration/Settlement, for its association with the early settlement and land use of the Eastern Shore of Virginia; and under Criterion C for its architecture as an example of the “big house, little house, colonnade, kitchen” type once common in the area. The period of significance runs from 1666 when the original land patent was granted for settlement of the area, until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the last architectural modifications were made to the house.

**Historical Background:**

The history of Willowdale as a plantation/farm and a dwelling is documented through Smith family wills, records of Accomack County, Whitelaw’s book on the Eastern Shore, and Smith family oral tradition. John Smith (wife Joyce) obtained a patent for the farm in 1666. His son, George Smith Sr. (wife Mary Huitt), inherited the 200 acre portion to the east, situated on the sea, upon John Smith’s death in 1678. (4) George Smith Sr. died in 1703, passing the farm to his wife Mary and their son Hewett Smith. Hewett Smith was married to Isabella (last name



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unknown). Hewett is named in Whitelaw as having built the present dwelling in 1728. (5) However, Whitelaw bases this conclusion on a dated brick embedded in the exterior, second story brick end on the south side of the house. Architectural evidence presented in the narrative description of this nomination suggests that the portion of brick containing the dated brick was the most recent addition to the main block of the house, and further suggests that the northern portion of the house was built in the late seventeenth century, probably by John or George.

Hewitt (Huett) Smith died in 1766, leaving the farm to grandson John. John died in 1804, leaving the original 200 acres to his son George (born 1776). George, who adopted the name George Smith MP to distinguish himself as the George Smith from Machipongo, married Mary C. Savage, heir to Francis Savage, who brought with her a large estate. (6) The present kitchen is thought by oral history and by Whitelaw to have been built by George MP. In 1837 George MP left 400 acres to Hugh Gordon Smith, husband to Margaret E.S. Rogers. (7)

On Hugh Gordon's death in August, 1879, Francis S. Smith inherited the 200 eastern most acres of the Machipongo farm, that being the original parcel that George had inherited. (8) Francis S. Smith (born c. 1842) and his wife Emma S. LeCato Smith (married 26 January 1871) had an infant son who contracted a fever on the long ride from Bell's Neck to Willowdale for High Gordon's funeral. Driven by his grief, Francis Smith (known in the family as "Papa Frank") later constructed the first bridge at Quimby, which stands to this day although much modernized, and can be seen from the property. Papa Frank performed many modernizations to the home, including enclosing the colonnade early in his ownership of the farm.

Papa Frank and Emma had six children: Edwin, Mary, Hugh Gordon, Francis R, Harry and Emma. Edwin inherited the farm in 1920 upon Papa Frank's death. Edwin died without issue and the property reverted to Papa Frank's remaining descendants. (9) Harry Smith lived on the Dower House on the back portion of the farm, where he and his wife had an only child, Emma Smith, later Emma Smith Gunther. Mrs. Gunther's hand-written yearbook from the Franktown Nassawadox High School class of 1926 has been self-published by her daughter. All originals of the yearbook were handwritten in 1926 by the students, and only two originals are known to exist.

Emma Smith Gunther inherited 122 acres of the farm, that part owned by her father as well as that owned by Uncle Edwin. Upon the death of Emma Smith Gunther the farm passed to her two children, Buddy Gunther and Frances Gunther Ramzy. Mrs Ramzy inherited the entire 122 acre farm upon the death of her brother. During the late twentieth century the dwelling fell into

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disrepair and the roof was not maintained, resulting in water intrusion with some damage to the original plaster as and structure.

In January of 2005, Frances Gunther Ramzy subdivided the 16 acre portion of the farm known as “the Point”, containing the Willowdale home, to her daughter Catherine Ramzy Harrison, the present owner, who is now undertaking the home’s preservation and reconstruction.

According to Whitelaw, the present house is believed to have been constructed by Hewitt Smith around 1728. Whitelaw says Hugh Gordon built the kitchen between 1837 and 1879. Francis Smith enclosed the colonnade forming the little house between 1879 and 1900. (10)

**Historic Context:**

The Smith family were early settlers in the new world, acquiring Willowdale farm on the eastern shore of Virginia at a time when that land was a wilderness inhabited by indigenous members of the Powatan nation. Over the ensuing centuries the farm, remaining in the continuous ownership of the Smith family, evolved from a colonial homestead and farm, to a plantation dependent upon the labor of slaves, and finally to the post-slavery farm that continues to be worked to this day. Similarly, the present dwelling incorporates elements from the earliest Smith habitation of the site and was updated over time as each ensuing generation of Smiths adapted to changing conditions and technologies. Willowdale’s unique continuous ownership by one family provides the opportunity to supplement records with oral history, for the study of settlement on the Eastern Shore, and of working plantation architecture from the colonial period through the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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**Endnotes:**

1. Gabrielle M. Lanier and Bernard L. Herman, *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic: Looking at Buildings and Landscapes*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 40.
2. Stratton Nottingham, *Wills and Administrations Accomack County, Virginia, 1663-1800*, (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc, 1999).
3. Ibid.
4. Ralph T. Whitelaw, *Virginia's Eastern Shore: A History of Northampton and Accomack Counties*, Volume I, (Gloucester, ME: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 588.
5. Whitelaw, p. 589.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Whitelaw, pp. 589-590.

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**9. Bibliography**

Ames, Susie M., editor. *County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia, 1640-1645*.  
Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1973.

Lanier, Gabrielle M. and Bernard L. Herman. *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic:  
Looking at Buildings and Landscapes*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Nottingham, Stratton. *Wills and Administrations Accomack County, Virginia, 1663-1800*.  
Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc, 1999.

Nugent, Nell Marion., *Cavalier and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents 1623-1666*.  
Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1934.

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Counties*. Volume I. Gloucester, ME: Peter Smith, 1968.

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The exact boundary of the 16-acre nominated parcel (A-1), Willowdale, is pictured in the accompanying scaled survey map labeled "Family Division of the Property of The Frances G. Ramzy Revocable Living Trust."

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary encompasses the 16-acre portion surrounding the original house which includes the ruin of an historic barn, and was the site of numerous outbuildings supporting the operation of the farm beginning in the late seventeenth century. This 16 acre parcel was subdivided in 2005, from the larger farm historically described as the Point, and the ownership transferred to the present owner, a Smith descendant, in order to facilitate the historic restoration of the Willowdale dwelling.

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**Photograph List**

**All digital images are of Willowdale, Accomack County, VA (#001-0062)**

**Photos taken by Catherine R. Harrison in 2005**

**Electronic images are stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources**

Photo 1 of 8: This image shows the approach to the west side of Willowdale as viewed heading east on the farm road, Willowdale Drive. The trees that frame the photograph mark the entrance to the Point, and indicate the beginning western boundary of the 16-acre nominated parcel.

Photo 2 of 8: This image shows the west side of Willowdale, facing the farm road to the west. In this view the kitchen dormer is evident, indicating the sleeping loft above the kitchen.

Photo 3 of 8: This image shows the north brick end of Willowdale. The shape of the gambrel roof is clear, as is the massive chimney. The brickwork features glazed headers, and is laid in Flemish bond. There is some deterioration in the brick work on the top and bottom of the east side (to the left), but otherwise the wall is sound.

Photo 4 of 8: This image shows the east side of Willowdale, facing the Machipongo River to the east. The tattered state of the temporary roof covering attests to frequent strong winds from the sea. Over the central door of the main house are signs of the portico that has collapsed since 1972. Below the portico are the salvageable remains of a brick porch featuring barrel vaulted support. The kitchen is at the far left of the structure, and the colonnade room has a shed like extension to the east that once shared a roofline with a now deteriorated southeastern porch along the colonnade and kitchen.

Photo 5 of 8: This image shows nineteenth century mouldings in the parlor of the main block of Willowdale. The window pictured is in the northwest corner of the parlor. There are four identical windows in the parlor, two facing east and two facing west

Photo 6 of 8: This image shows remnants of early faux wood grain painting treatments on the door of the southern upstairs bedroom in the main house. Original hardware has been stolen by vandals.

Photo 7 of 8: This image is a view of the kitchen fireplace and surrounding cabinetry. The kitchen fireplace is on the southernmost end of the house, and faces north. Deterioration of the brickwork is evident.

Photo 8 of 8: This image shows the view east from the center passage door of the main block of the Willowdale home. The Machipongo River is visible through the trees.

